

ABSTRACT

TITLE: Rivers Policy and Classification Plan

SUBJECT: Planning and management of the state's watershed resources

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ABSTRACT: This plan establishes policies and suggested courses of action for the maintenance or the restoration of fresh and estuarine waters, and their associated watersheds, in the state. The plan also sets forth the procedures for the designation of local watershed councils or associations. Additionally, this document includes classification of waterbodies in accordance with the classification system that was legislatively required and in accordance with the classification system established by the Coastal Resources Management Council.

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PREFACE

This plan addresses two basic questions: how to protect and improve resource quality in Rhode Island's rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, estuaries, and associated wetlands, and how to realize public benefit from these resources.

In establishing the Rhode Island Rivers Council in 1991, the General Assembly found that Rhode Island lacked "an affirmative, clearly articulated program to manage and protect its rivers and watershed resources" (*Section 46-28-2(a), General Laws of Rhode Island*). The Rivers Council was created to integrate the wide array of efforts in Rhode Island to protect and enhance riverine resources. The Rivers Council is not a regulatory agency; its functions are planning, coordination, and empowerment. The Rivers Council has three basic duties: 1) to develop a "rivers" classification plan for Rhode Island, 2) to prepare a rivers policy for Rhode Island, and 3) to recognize local watershed councils as bodies corporate and politic.

The Rivers Council has reviewed river protection efforts, the condition and use of rivers, and aspirations for estuary and watershed quality and use. The *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* has been developed inductively, from the bottom-up. In the course of this work, the Rivers Council has found that there is a vibrant level of public interest in rivers. Planning for rivers and estuaries is extensive and often high quality. At the state and local levels, programs have been implemented to protect fresh and estuarine water resources from both point and nonpoint sources of pollution. The need is to make existing efforts more useful to the public.

Preparation of this plan reflects the efforts of many individuals. Statewide Planning staff involved in the preparation of the plan include Kevin J. Nelson, Principal Planner as a primary author, Christina Delage, GIS Specialist for providing maps, and John P. O'Brien, Chief, George W. Johnson, Assistant Chief, and Blanche Higgins, Supervising Planner for their supervision and oversight of the project.

While all members of the Rivers Council contributed to crafting the plan, several members deserve special thanks. Meg Kerr, Chair of the Rivers Council was not only a primary author but also a driving force in achieving consensus on many issues. Scott Millar, Vice-Chair, provided a watershed approach vision in crafting many sections of the plan. Kevin Cute of the Coastal Resources Management Council was instrumental in incorporating classifications of tidal waters into what had previously been a freshwaters plan.

The efforts of the local Watershed Councils in providing updated information for rivers classification is also greatly appreciated.

Finally, the 2003 revisions would not have been possible without the able assistance of Rob Adler from EPA Region 1. His careful craftsmanship, attention to detail, and fresh perspective were key to the success of the revision process.

Adoption

The Rivers Council Act calls for the *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* to be adopted by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan. With this action, the *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* will serve formally as guidance for action at the local government level. The real keys to achieving the goals set forth in the Rhode Island Rivers Act are broad understanding of the value of fresh and estuarine water resources in the state and citizen involvement in watershed protection efforts. This report was adopted by the State Planning Council as State Guide Plan Element 162, the *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan*, on December 17, 1997. The amendments to the Plan were adopted on May 13, 2004

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